

WHY YOU DO WHAT YOU SHOULDN'T

Most of us realize that in disregarding many common rules of proper behavior such as "Don't be late," "Don't walk on the grass," etc., we make life very uncomfortable and irritating to others. Yet many people still persist in doing what they know they should not do.

According to Dr. William Schumacher, who is a Westport, Conn., psychiatrist, there are many reasons for these minor infractions. Some of these thoughts may assist in greater understanding and guidance to students.

"1) You may not really know what's wrong. Some people simply never have learned--or been taught--right from wrong. They can't see anything wrong in allowing their leaves to blow onto a neighbor's place, or in strewing trash at the picnic grounds.

Either their parents or teachers have never stressed right and wrong in life's little repetitive situations, or the teaching never really has sunk in.

"2) You may lead a rush-rush life. You know the type: nothing can wait, everything must be done in a hurry. These 'do-it-now' types jaywalk with hardly a twist of conscience. Sometimes they weigh the pros and cons of slowing down--and of following the rule--then decide it just isn't worth it.

Actually, the U. S. has a tradition for the 'do-it-now' school. Delay is deadly to many Americans, and so the little rules just fall by the wayside.

"3) You may have need to rebel. Some people associate rules with authority, and authority with parents or teachers, against whom they feel a need to rebel.

Don't misunderstand. These types don't consciously say, 'I'm breaking a rule to defy my parents.' However, something close to that flashes across the innards of their minds--on an unconscious level.

"4) You may think the rules absurd. Some people simply feel the rules make no sense. Thus they have no qualms about breaking them. Perhaps this is why Marilyn Monroe sidesteps the rule, 'be on time.'

For public as well as private appointments, Marilyn has been known to keep people waiting.

Strictly speaking, some little rules lean over a bit far. It would be naive not to concede that.

"5) You may feel superior. There's the individual who believes the little rules are not made for him, he's above them.

Somehow, he feels a bit above and beyond regulations. This can be a symptom of important emotional upset--but when it applies only to little rules and not to other more vital things in life, there's not much to worry about.

Somewhat related is the meek soul who cannot be a non-conformist at home or at work. But he can by breaking a little rule 'on the outside.'

"How to teach adherence to the rules? With most adults, it's probably too late. Ideally, children should be taught by parents, teachers, friends, and church counselors to adhere. They should be taught, too, by parental example--that is, parents must practice what they preach.

"Of course, children should not be threatened with serious punishment if they break a little rule now and again. But they should be taught to adhere, when possible, on the basis of thoughtfulness, consideration, plain, common decency, and regard for the other fellow.

"These, after all, are important ingredients in a growing conscience.

"This brings us to another, and equally important, point. Occasional breaking of little rules rarely is an indicator of emotional upset. On the contrary, the occasional rule-breaker is likely to be exhibiting fairly healthy behavior. He's showing that he can make a conscious choice.

"It's the never-break-a-rule or always break-a-rule types who probably are in trouble. Their behavior may be compulsive, and compulsiveness can be a symptom of real emotional distress."